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ABSTRACT

Previous research has suggested that identical performances by men and women are often evaluated differently. Men with high-quality accomplishments are perceived more positively than women, while unsuccessful men are rated more negatively than their female counterparts. This study extended the research by including elderly stimulus persons to compare attitudes toward the young and the old. Participants evaluated either a good or a bad essay supposedly written by one of four target persons: a 24-year-old woman; a 24-year-old man; a 63-year-old woman; or a 63-year-old man. The quality of the young man's and the elderly woman's essay profoundly affected evaluations of them, but essay quality had no impact on ratings of young women and old men. The data suggest that participants' negative stereotypes caused them to expect the accomplishments of young women and old men to be of lower quality than those of young men or old women. Possible explanations for the higher expectations for elderly women's performance are, first, that participants felt that she was a deviant case (superior despite being old and female); or, second, that our culture possesses a rather positive stereotype of all elderly women. (Author)

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OLD MEN AND YOUNG WOMEN:
PARTNERS IN DISCRIMINATION

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Our culture appears to possess generally more positive stereotypes of the competence of men than of the competence of women (McKee and Sherriffs, 1957; Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, and Rosenkrantz, 1972). Moreover, individuals seem to evaluate the performance of men and women in a way which conforms to these stereotypes. This is particularly true in settings where performance evaluation is somewhat subjective -- for example, rating the quality of a work of modern art or an essay (Pheterson, Kiesler and Goldberg, 1971). Here, stereotypes may cause individuals to expect better performance from men than from women. As a consequence, high quality performance by a man may be evaluated more positively than equivalent accomplishment by a female, whose success is not anticipated.

Several studies have illustrated this effect. Goldberg's (1968) female participants felt that articles published in professional journals and attributed to male authors had more value, persuasiveness, and profundity and that their authors had more ability to sway the reader than identical articles attributed to female authors. Etaugh and Rose (1975) found similar effects using articles published in magazines for teenagers. In addition, Australian high school girls evaluated men who were at the top of their class more positively than equivalently successful females (Feather and Simon, 1975). Finally, highly qualified male applicants for a study abroad program were perceived to be more competent than identical females (Deaux and Taynor, 1973). This devaluation of successful females seems to lower the level of their employment opportunities as well. For example, chairmen of 155 graduate programs, asked to rate potential job candidates, felt that male Ph.D.'s should have been offered higher level positions than females with identical qualifications.(Fiddell, 1970).

If men are generally expected to succeed, what happens when they do not? Several studies have illustrated that bias works two ways -- unsuccessful males seem to be penalized for deviating from expectations by being evaluated more harshly than their female counterparts. In the Deaux and Taynor study described above, other participants listened to a taped interview with a poorly qualified applicant for the study abroad program.

The incompetent male was evaluated more negatively than his female counterpart. Feather and Simon (1975) also varied the success level of their stimulus persons and found that students evaluated an unsuccessful male who was at the bottom of his class more negatively than they evaluated an equivalent female. In addition, the least qualified psychologist in the Fiddell (1970) study was felt to be less desirable and was considered appropriate for a lower appointment if the person was male than if female.

In summary, the higher expectations which our culture has for men seem to produce greater attention to the actual merits of their performance. If their work fits expectations by being good, it is evaluated positively; if it violates expectations by being poor, it is evaluated negatively. The actual quality of women's accomplishments appears to have less impact. Good performance is not perceived as positively and poor performance is not perceived as negatively.

The same processes that cause different evaluations of the performances of men and women may also cause differential ratings of young and old persons' accomplishments. Several questionnaire studies suggest that our culture has more negative stereotypes of the competence of old people than of people in general (Aaronson, 1966; Eisdorfer and Altrocchi, 1961; McTavish, 1971). In that sense, the position of the old vis-à-vis the young in this society appears analagous to the position of women vis-à-vis men. It seems plausible that research which varied the age of the stimulus person in addition to competence (using a design similar to those employed by Deaux and Taynor and Feather and Simon) would find that old persons' performances would be evaluated similarly to those of young women. In other words, young men who are successful would be evaluated more positively than young women or old persons of either sex; unsuccessful young men would be evaluated more negatively.

Of course, given the voluminous research which illustrates that men and women are perceived differently (Deaux, 1976), it may not be appropriate to lump old men and old women together.

Our culture may hold very different views of the two groups. However, even though the importance of investigating aging within the context of the individual's sex was pointed out long ago (Cottrell, 1942; Linton, 1942; Parsons, 1942), most research on attitudes toward the aged seems to think of the elderly as unisexed -- participants are usually asked to rate "old people" rather than old men or old women. A few studies (Bell and Stanfield, 1973; Connor and Walsh, in press; Kogan and Shelton, 1960) have compared young and old men or young and old women. Almost no research has compared the status of old men and old women in relation to their younger counterparts. One study which did make this comparison found that old women were evaluated more negatively on one out of seven questions; no distinctions at all were made between young and old men (Weinberger and Millham, 1975).

The purpose of this study was two-fold. We hoped to explore further the effects of stereotypes on evaluations of the performance of the young and the old, and we also hoped to explore the impact of sex-role stereotypes on ratings of young and old persons of both sexes.

This study essentially replicated the design used by Deaux and Taynor (1973) and extended it to include old stimulus persons. We varied the quality of performance, sex, and age of a target person. Participants evaluated either a good or a bad essay written by one of the following: a young female, a young male, an old female, or an old male. It was hypothesized that high quality performance by a young male would be evaluated more positively than identical performance by a young female or old people. Conversely, low quality performance by a young man would be evaluated more negatively than equivalent behaviors by young women or the aged. Because of the scarcity of previous research, no hypotheses concerning the evaluations of the old male relative to the old female were advanced.

METHOD

Participants

The participants were 74 undergraduate students at Loyola Marymount University. They were tested in a classroom setting. However, participation in the experiment was voluntary.

Stimulus Materials

Two articles describing a lithograph by the artist Hoi were developed. Each article described essentially similar information about the content of the lithograph, the artist's use of color, and the emotional tone conveyed. One article was well written and presented the information in a clear and well organized manner. The second was badly written; organization was poor and there were several spelling and grammatical errors. Ratings by an independent sample of participants confirmed that the two essays were perceived as highly discrepant in quality. One half of the participants were shown the well written article, one half the badly written article. A small reproduction of the lithograph which could by shown to all participants on an opague projector was used as support for the essays.

Four brief biographical descriptions of the alleged author were also developed. Although the descriptions were identical, one half of the participants were told that the author was named John Simpson, one half that the author was named Joan Simpson. In addition, one half were told that the author was 25 years old, one half that the author was 64 years old. In all conditions, the author was described as an employee of Metropolitan Insurance Company. The exact nature of the position was left unspecified.

One biography was attached to the front of each article, and a short questionnaire was attached to the back.

Dependent Measures

Participants were asked to indicate on seven-point Likert scales how knowledgeable the author seemed about art, how able the author was to express ideas, how likely they would be to ask the author's advice about art, and how likely they would be to publish the article. In addition, participants rated the overall quality of the article.

Procedure

Participants were instructed by the experimenter that this was a study of how people form opinions about the work of others. They were then told that they would be shown copies of an article which had been submitted to a small local newspaper in response to an advertisement for someone to write an art column on a part-time basis. They would also be given some biographical information which had been culled from the resume of the article's author. They were asked to read the biographical information and article carefully and to fill out the attached questionnaire.

The stimulus materials and questionnaires were then passed out, face down, to the participants. After the materials had been distributed, the experimenter projected the reproduction onto the screen and explained to participants that this was the lithograph described in the article. Participants were then allowed to begin reading the materials. The projection of the lithograph was left on during the rest of the experiment.

After the questionnaires were completed, participants were debriefed. Questioning revealed that subjects had little or no awareness of the purpose of the study.

Summary of Design

Participants were assigned randomly to one of two sex of target conditions, one of two age of target conditions and one of two quality of article conditions. This resulted in a 2 x 2 x 2 design.

RESULTS

A 2 x 2 x 2 (age of target, sex of target and essay quality) multivariate analysis of variance was performed using the five dependent variables (Cramer, 1970).

The three-way interaction was significant in the MANOVA ($F(5,62) = 2.92$; $p<.05$) and in the univariate analyses for three of the questions: 1) the author's knowledge of art ($F(1,66) = 7.78$; $p<.01$) 2) participants' desire to ask the author for art advice ($F(1,66) = 7.24$; $p<.01$) and 3) the author's ability to express ideas ($F(1,66) = 8.34$; $p<.01$). A fourth question, the participants' desire to publish the essay, had a marginally significant interaction ($F(1,60) = 3.31$; $p<.08$). The pattern of this interaction is similar for all dependent variables.

Figure one illustrates the interaction for the author's perceived knowledge of art. The Student-Neuman Keuls test revealed that young men who wrote high quality essays were perceived to be more knowledgeable than young men whose work was of poorer quality ($q(8,66) = 6.25$; $p<.01$). Similarly, participants felt that old women producing good essays were more knowledgeable than old women producing poorer essays ($q(6,66) = 5.67$; $p<.01$). However, essay quality had no effect on the perceived knowledgeability of either old men ($q(4,66) = 2.70$; NS) or young women ($q(2,66) = 1.74$; NS).

The participants' liklihood of asking the author for art advice followed a similar pattern (see figure 2).Essay quality had a highly significant impact on ratings of the young man ($q(8,66) = 7.24$; $p<.01$) and a marginally significant effect on ratings of the old woman ($q(6,66) = 4.04$; $p<.06$). Again perceptions of the young woman ($q(4,66) = 2.90$; NS) and the old man ($q(2,66) = 1.15$; NS) were not affected by the quality of the essay produced by these stimulus persons.

The interaction regarding the perceptions of the stimulus person's ability to express ideas is illustrated in figure 3.

The quality of the essay significantly affected the participants' ratings of the young male author ($q(8,66) = 7.16$; $p<.01$) and the old female ($q(6,66) = 6.27$; $p<.01$), but did not affect evaluations of the old male ($q(2,66) = 1.06$; NS). In this case, however, it did affect perceptions of the young female's ability - participants felt that a young female who wrote a good essay was better able to express herself than an equivalent female with poorer essay writing abilities ($q(4,61$; $p<.01$).

The marginally significant interaction for participants' reported desire to publish the essay is illustrated in figure 4. Once again, participants were more likely to publish a young male's high quality essay than his poorer essay ($q(8,66) = 6.98$; $p<.01$) and to publish an old female's high quality essay than her poorer one ($q(5,66) = 4.40$; $p<.05$). Ratings of old men ($q(3,66) = 2.82$; NS) and young women ($q(4,66) = 3.44$; NS) were again not affected by the quality of their writing.

Overall, females were never evaluated significantly differently from their male counterparts, nor were the elderly ever evaluated significantly differently from their youthful equivalents, for any of the five dependent variables.

The main effect of essay quality was highly significant in the multivariate analysis of variance ($F(5,62) = 15.0$; $p<.001$) and in the univariate analyses for each of the five dependent variables. The success of our manipulation of essay quality received strong support - participants felt that the good essay was of much higher quality than the poorer essay ($F(1,66) = 57.9$; $p<.001$). In addition, those who read the good essay felt that its author was more knowledgeable ($F(1,66) = 39.7$; $p<.001$) and better able to express ideas ($F(1,66) = 51.3$; $p<.001$).

They were also more likely to ask this author for art advice ($F(1,66) = 32.5$; $p<.001$) and to publish the essay ($F(1,66) = 39.7$; $p<.001$) than participants exposed to the low quality essay.

With one exception, no other effects were significant in the MANOVA. The MANOVA age x essay quality interaction was significant ($F(5,62) = 3.2$; $p<.05$) but none of the univariate analyses reached significance. Therefore, we do not discuss this effect in more detail.

DISCUSSION

Overall, the quality of young men's and old women's essays affected evaluations of these persons, while essay quality had no impact on evaluations of young women or old men. Young men and old women who wrote a good essay were perceived as being more knowledgeable about art than those who wrote a bad essay. Participants also would be more likely to ask the author for advice and publish the essay if they read a high quality essay by a young male or an old female than if they read a low quality essay. There were no significant differences in the evaluation of the authors of good vs. bad essays written by old men and young women.

The ratings of young men and women replicate the findings of both Deaux and Taynor (1973) and Feather and Simon (1975) and can perhaps be explained in terms of participants' expectations. Men are expected to be more knowledgeable about art and when their performance fits this expectation they are rewarded with a very positive evaluation. When male actions do not measure up to expectations, their poor performance may be especially salient to observers who then punish men for their marked deviation from the expected by giving them low evaluations. On the other hand, young women may be victims of an especially strong stereotype that their performances will be less successful and more mediocre than those of men. Since neither good nor poor performance severely violates this mediocre stereotype, performance quality may remain somewhat unnoticed and evaluations may remain at a mediocre level.

Perhaps an analogy can be drawn to a teacher evaluating the performance of two persons -- one who has been stereotyped an an "A" student (comparable to men) and the other who has been stereotyped as a "C" student (comparable to women). When a teacher reads a good essay by the "A" student, it fits his expectations and the student is rewarded with an A. However, if a teacher reads the A student's bad essay, it severely and saliently violates expectancies and the horrified teacher promptly assigns an F grade. The teacher expects mediocre performance by the "C" student, so neither a high nor low quality essay forcefully violates his stereotype. The prior belief that this is after all a "C" student may therefore have more impact on the grade assigned than the actual quality of the performance, and a good essay would receive a C+ and the bad essay a C- grade.

On one question, a young woman's performance level did affect ratings of her. Participants felt that a young woman who wrote a good essay was able to express her ideas better than when she wrote a bad essay. Perhaps observers expect women to write as well as men even though they don't think they're as knowledgeable as men. Goldberg's (1968) data offer support for this argument. Since the writing style of male and female authors was rated equivalently in his research, Goldberg concluded: "Perhaps because the world has accepted female authors for a long time, the girls were willing to concede that the female professionals' writing styles were not far inferior to those of men."

A comparison of evaluations of young and old men reveals that old men are treated more harshly than young women. The quality of their performance did not affect their ratings on <u>any</u> of the dependent variables. Old men did not even share in the objective evaluations received by young women on the writing ability question. The group means illustrate that the difference between the good and bad essay conditions was smaller for old men on every question than it was for the other three target persons -- the quality of elderly males' actions has the most insignificant impact on perceptions of them.

Old women, on the other hand, were evaluated as objectively as young men. Their performance level had a significant impact on ratings on each of the dependent variables. Old women who wrote good essays were seen as being more knowledgeable and better able to express themselves than those who wrote bad essays. Participants also reported that they would prefer to ask the good essay writers for advice and would be more likely to publish their essay. It seems that they expected elderly females' performance to be good.

Why does prejudice seem to increase as men age and decrease as women age? There are three possible explanations for the surprising evaluation of the elderly woman. First, the person depicted in this research may have been perceived as a very unusual 64 year old female since she was knowledgeable about art, could write, and was interested in obtaining employment as a newspaper columnist. When confronted with such a "deviant" person, participants may totally throw out their stereotypes about elderly women as a group and evaluate this "special case" purely on the merits of the woman's performance.

Second, individuals may find independent behavior, such as seeking a job, particularly charming in a 64 year old woman. Kastenbaum and Simonds (1977) argue that observers may particularly enjoy or admire an old woman for independent or even "sassy" traits that upset observers' expectations of appropriate behavior for women. Thus the old woman's extreme deviance from the behavior expected of women might cause participants to have a very favorable attitude toward her.

Third, the stereotype of older women may actually be rather positive. Safilios-Rothchild (1977) has argued that cross-culturally post-menopausal women are more likely to be granted the freedom of movement and behavior which is usually reserved for men. In addition, younger participants may have a more positive stereotype of old women than old men because of their relations with grandparents.

Children and young adult women pick maternal grandmothers rather than grandfathers as their favorite older relative (Hoffman, 1977; Kahana and Kahana, 1970).

Future research should systematically vary the interests and employment aspirations of the old woman depicted in stimulus materials in ways which either conform or deviate from expectations of typical behavior of old women. Such research would suggest whether our results were caused by perceptions that this was a deviant aged woman or by a generally positive stereotype of all old women.

In general, our research clearly illustrates the importance of comparing attitudes toward old women with those of old men. Findings based on sexless "old person" targets seem to have little utility in predicting reactions toward real life persons and their achievements. In addition, our study points out the importance of varying performance level. If we had used only poorly written essays, the data would suggest a more positive attitude toward young women and old men than toward young men and old women. The insertion of the high quality essays illustrates that stereotypes may cause the bias against young women and old men to work in two ways -- positively when performance is poor and negatively when performance is good.

It doesn't matter whether the accomplishments of old men are meritorious or faulty -- others will think they are mediocre regardless. This pattern of results may be of benefit to elderly men whose performances are flawed since they will be evaluated slightly more positively than a younger man who has identical accomplishments. However, an injustice is likely to be done to those who are high achievers, since their commendable accomplishments are likely to go unpraised more than those of their younger counterparts. Our research suggests that this bias against aged men does not remain at an attitudinal level, but also has important behavioral implications. The quality of the elderly man's achievements not only had no impact on participants' attitudes toward him; it also failed to affect the behaviors the participants reported they would direct toward him -- publishing the article and seeking advice from the author.

SUMMARY

Previous research has suggested that identical performances by men and women are often evaluated differently. Men with high quality accomplishments are perceived more positively than women, while unsuccessful men are rated more negatively than their female counterparts.

Our study extended this research by including elderly stimulus persons to compare attitudes toward the young and the old. Participants evaluated either a good or bad essay supposed written by one of four target persons: 1) a 24 year old woman, 2) a 24 year old man, 3) a 63 year old woman, or 4) a 63 year old man.

The quality of the young man's and the elderly woman's essay profoundly affected evaluations of them, but essay quality had no impact on ratings of young women and old men. The data suggest that participants' negative stereotypes caused them to expect the accomplishments of young women and old men to be of lower quality than those of young men or old women.

Possible explanations for the higher expectations for elderly women's performance are: 1) participants felt that she was a deviantly superior old female, or 2) our culture possesses a rather positive stereotype of all elderly women.

The findings illustrate the importance of obtaining separate evaluations of elderly women and elderly men in future research.

In terms of practical applications, this study suggests that both young women and aged men will not receive objective evaluations of their performances in occupational settings. Moreover the bias against them works two ways - negatively when their performance is good, and positively when it is poor.

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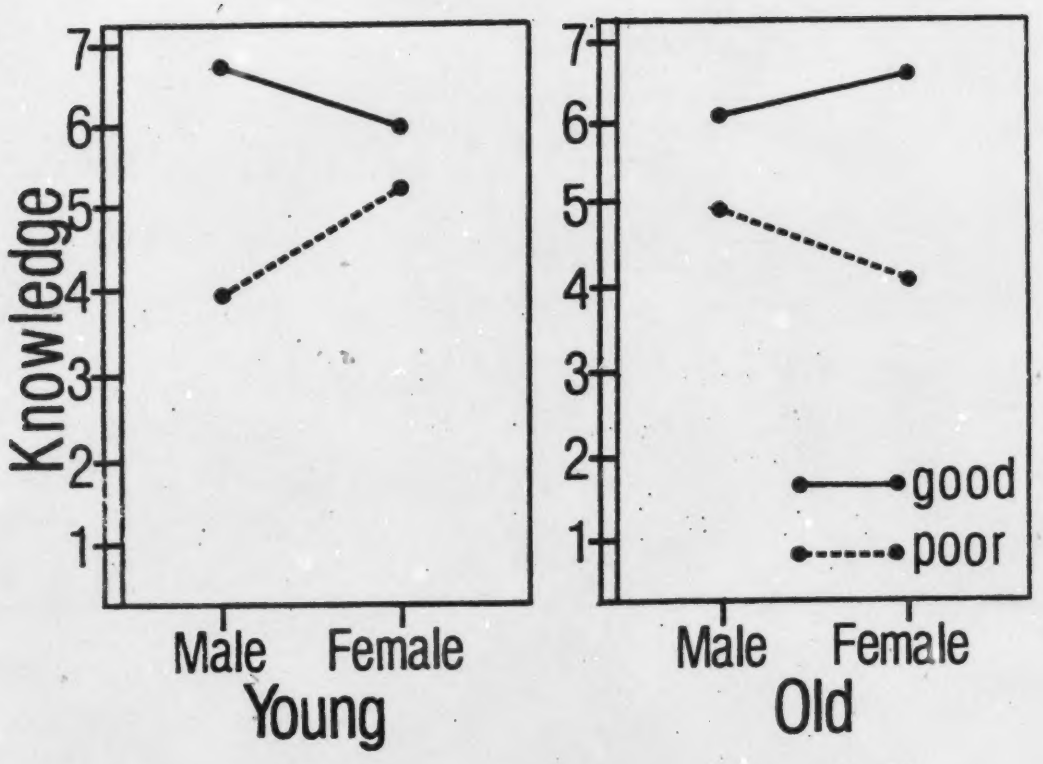
Knowledge
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Figure 1

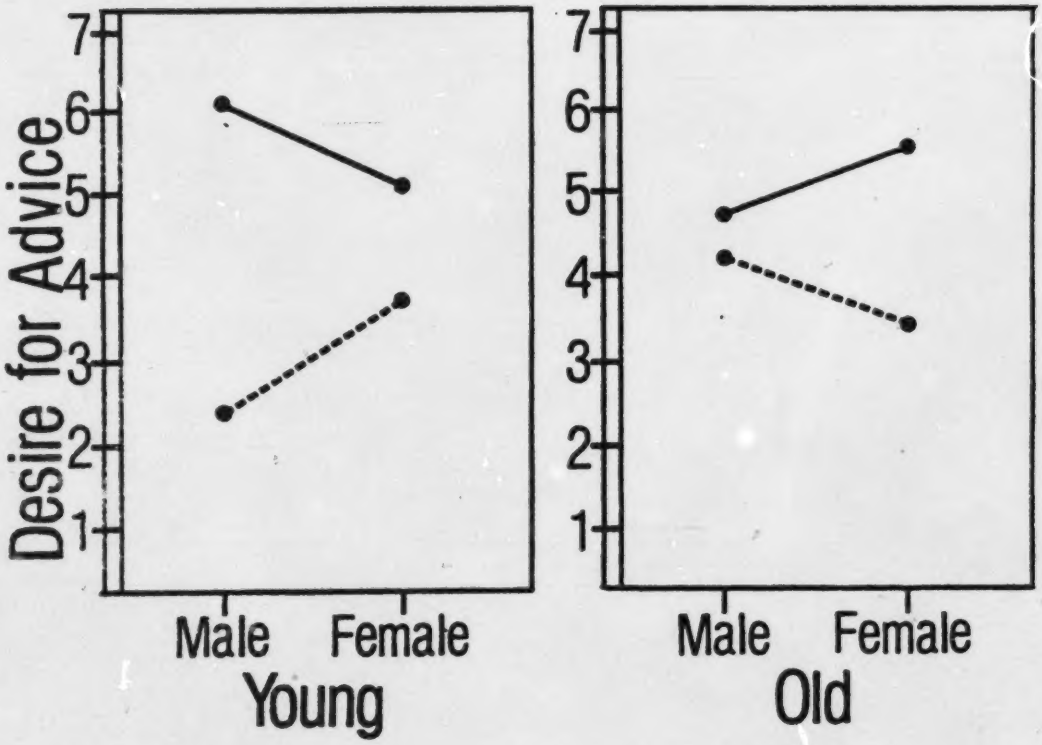
Desire for Advice
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Figure 2

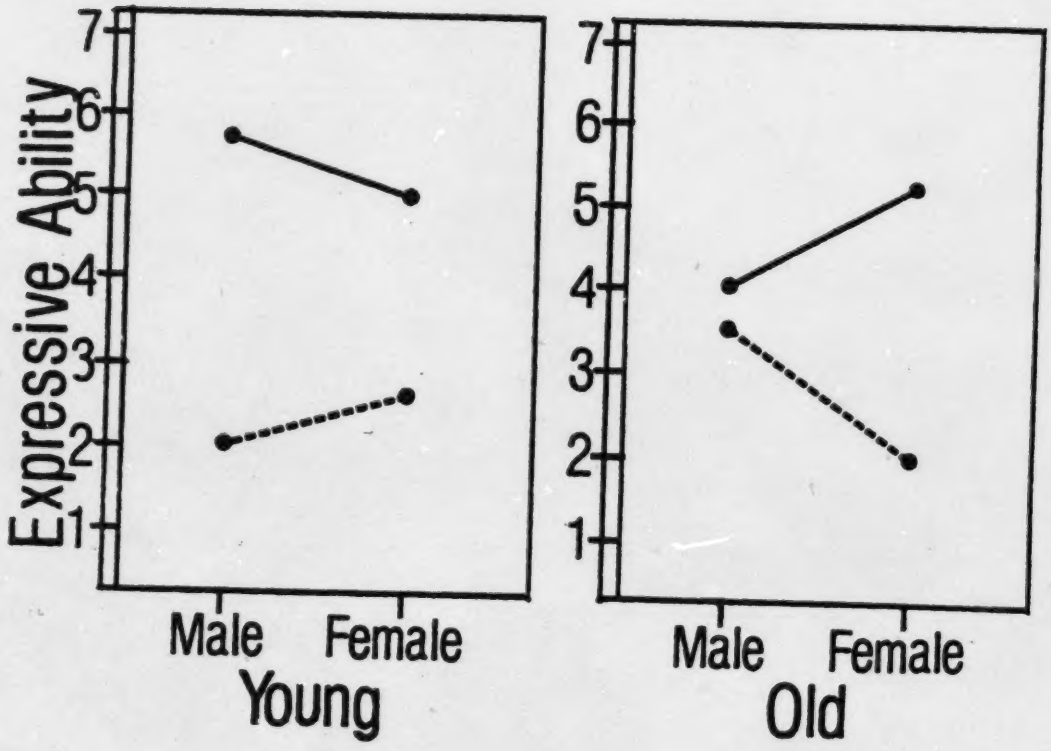

Figure 3

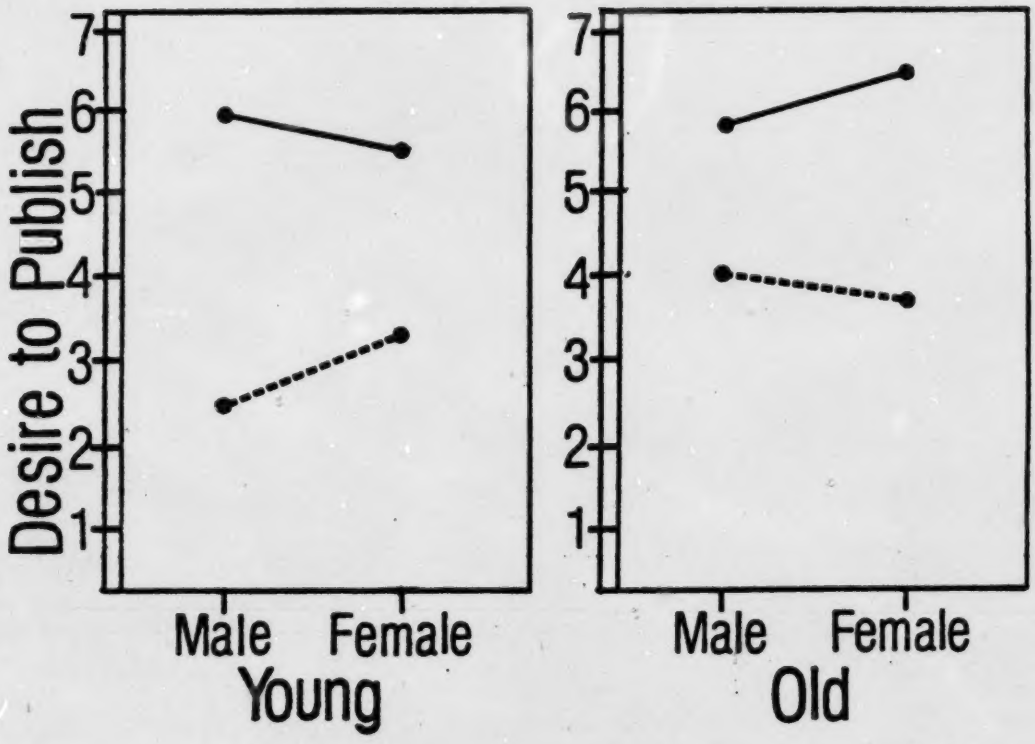
Desire to Publish
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Figure 4